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C O N F I D E N T I A L TALLINN 000106

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [EN](#)

SUBJECT: ESTONIA'S BRONZE SOLDIER: IT'S DEJA VU ALL OVER
AGAIN

REF: TALLINN 79

Classified By: CDA Jeff Goldstein for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (U) On February 15, the Estonian Parliament passed the "Illegal Structures Removal" bill by a margin of 46 to 44. The bill prohibits all public displays of structures that glorify the occupation of Estonia and/or mass oppression of the Estonian people and which may pose a threat to public order, safety, or property, incite hatred, and/or disrupt public order. The bill as passed included an amendment that would require the government to remove the Soviet-era WWII monument, the "Bronze Soldier", in central Tallinn within 30 days. Later the same day, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves announced that he would not sign the bill. President Ilves said that it was unconstitutional and violated the separation of powers. Ilves sharply criticized the bill's supporters, stating that they knew it was unconstitutional and were simply playing for political gain in next month's elections.

¶2. (SBU) While Ilves' decision probably kills the bill until at least after the elections, it by no means ends the matter. The recently-passed "War Graves Protection" law (reftel) created a Commission that will recommend to the Minister of Defense which war graves and monuments ought to be removed to alternative locations. The majority of Commission members are from the Reform Party, which has pressed to have the Bronze Soldier moved. On February 14, with very little fanfare, Jurgen Ligi, Defense Minister and Reform member, convened the first meeting of Commission. The press has speculated that Reform may even seek to use this means to remove the Bronze Soldier in the interregnum between the March 4 elections and the formation of a new government.

¶3. (C) The Russian reaction has unsurprisingly been swift and inflammatory. In a February 15 interview in Eesti Express, the Russian Ambassador to Estonia Nikolai Uspensky said that any talk of the Bronze Soldier's possible removal could lead to real consequences and tough sanctions. In a conversation with Simmu Tiik, MFA Director for Eastern and Central Europe, he said that Russia's "drum-banging" was nothing unexpected or new. Tikk said, "Moscow knows that talk like that is counter-productive in Estonia. Their statements are less about events in Estonia and more about their pushing their own agenda." With Russian elections on the horizon, Tikk felt that Moscow's "outbursts" were designed more for domestic consumption. He said further, that the MFA's policy is to keep a low profile and wait for the dust to settle in order to get back to "business as normal."

¶4. (C) Comment. The motivation of the bill's supporters is clearly political. The big question now is whether supporters of removing the Bronze Soldier will continue their push after the elections, or whether their interest

will dry up once the issue can no longer be milked for
electoral advantage. End Comment.
GOLDSTEIN